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POL 14 VIETS

INCOMING TELEGRAM Department of State

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Action

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Info

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PP RUEHC
DE RUMJIR 19123 0591250
ZNY CCCCC
P 281135Z FEB 67
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY
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1967 FEB 28 AM 8 32

Saigon 19123

S E C R E T SECTION ONE OF TWO SAIGON 19123

L I M D I S

1. EMBOFF VISITED TRAN VAN HUONG IN VUONG TAU FEB. 27. HUONG SAID THAT HE HAS NOT YET DECIDED WHETHER OR NOT TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT. HIS DECISION WILL BE MADE AFTER HE HAS STUDIED THE COMPLETED CONSTITUTION AND HAS A CHANCE TO SIZE UP HIS OPPONENTS. HE DOES NOT WANT TO RUN IF IT IS CLEAR IN ADVANCE THAT THE ELECTION IS CERTAIN TO BE WON BY "THOSE WHO HAVE MONEY, POWER AND FORCE."

2. HUONG EMPHASIZED THE NECESSITY FOR COOPERATION AND GOOD WILL BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN POLITICAL ELEMENTS. HE CONSIDERS THIS RELATIONSHIP THE KEY PROBLEM FACING ANY FUTURE GOVERNMENT, AND HE IS FRANKLY SKEPTICAL THAT THE MILITARY WILL BE WILLING TO GIVE UP ANY MEANINGFUL MEASURE OF THEIR PRESENT POWER. HE FEARS THAT A CIVILIAN

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PRESIDENT MAY NOT PROVE ABLE TO CONTROL THE MILITARY. HE SAID THAT WHILE GOOD WILL IS NECESSARY ON BOTH SIDES, THE MILITARY MUST SHOW THE MOST GOOD WILL BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE MOST FORCE.

3. HUONG SAID THAT FORMER MINISTER OF YOUTH VO LONG TRIEU HAS DISCUSSED WITH HIM THE POSSIBILITY OF PROMOTING MILITARY-CIVILIAN COOPERATION BY APPOINTING KY AS HIS PRIME MINISTER. HUONG EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT KY, HAVING ACQUIRED THE TASTE FOR POWER, WOULD BE WILLING TO ACCEPT ANYTHING LESS THAN THE PRESIDENCY. HUONG ALSO ASKED EMBOFF IF THE PRESENT "OPEN RIVALRY" BETWEEN KY AND THIEU WOULD NOT BE LIKELY TO CONTINUE IF KY WERE PRIME MINISTER UNDER A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT. WITHOUT SAYING SO DIRECTLY, HUONG INDICATED THAT HE IS VERY DOUBTFUL KY WOULD TAKE ORDERS FROM A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT.

SECRET

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Joan Lyell DATE 10/5/81
RDS ☐ or XGS ☐ EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
DECLASSIFIED ☑ RELEASABLE ☑
RELEASE DENIED ☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

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4. ASKED IF HE AS THOUGHT OF ACCEPTING THE JOB OF PRIME MINISTER UNDER A MILITARY PRESIDENT SUCH AS KY OR THIEU, HUONG AT FIRST SAID HE HAS "NOT YET CONSIDERED" SUCH A TICKET. LATER IN THE CONVERSATION HE SAID THAT HE TOLD TRIEU HE WOULD NOT RUN FOR PRIME MINISTER

WITH KY, AND HE IS ALSO SURE THAT KY WOULD NOT AGREE TO RUN FOR VICE PRESIDENT ON HIS (HUONG'S) TICKET.

5. HUONG ALSO SAID THAT HE BELIEVES A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT SHOULD HAVE A MILITARY MAN AS HIS PRIME MINISTER.

6. WHEN EMBOFF MENTIONED RUMORS THAT HUONG HAS CHOSEN VNQDD LEADER AND CIVILIAN DIRECTORATE MEMBER PHAN KHOAN AS HIS VICE PRESIDENTIAL RUNNING MATE, HUONG SAID THAT THIS IS TRUE. HE SAID THAT ONE "CANNOT IGNORE HALF OF THE COUNTRY" AND SO HE MUST INCLUDE A MAN FROM CENTRAL VIET-NAM ON HIS TICKET. HE HAD THOUGHT OF CENTRAL VNQDD LEADER TRAN DINH NA, BUT NAM WOULD ONLY RUN FOR PRESIDENT. THEREFORE, IF HUONG DECIDES TO RUN, HE "MAY INVITE" KHOAN TO RUN WITH HIM.

7. COMMENTING ON EMBOFF'S REMARKS ABOUT US HOPES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN VIETNAM, HUONG SAID FLATLY THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE ARE NOT READY FOR DEMOCRACY. EXCEPT FOR THE INTELLECTUALS AND A SMALL BOURGOISIE, THE PEOPLE DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY. THE IMPORTANT THING IS (A) TO RESTORE THE

CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE IN THEIR OWN GOVERNMENT, AND (B) TO RESTORE ORDER AND DISCIPLING. THE PROGRAM HE WOULD FOLLOW IN OFFICE WOULD AIM AT PROVIDING SECURITY, ATZVXG CWIVELI OOD,* AND "HAPPINESS" FOR THE ORDINARY MAN. THIS IS WHAT THE LONG-SUFFERING PEOPLE WANT, NOT DEMOCRACY.

8. SPEAKING OF THE CONSTITUTION, HUONG SAID HE THINKS THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH HAS BEEN GIVEN TOO MUCH POWER. IN THE PRESENT SITUATION A VERY STRONG

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EXECUTIVE IS REQUIRED. HE HAD NOT HEARD OF THE ASSEMBLY'S RECENT CHANGE IN THE ARTICLE COVERING VOTES OF "NO CONFIDENCE." HE EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WHEN EMBOFF EXPLAINED THAT UNDER THE REVISED PROVISIONS IT WILL LIKELY PROVE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR THE ASSEMBLY TO FORCE REMOVAL OF A PRIME MINISTER.

9. IN DISCUSSING THE POWERS OF THE PRESIDENT, HUONG PUT GREAT STRESS ON THE NEED FOR THE PRESIDENT TO CONTROL THE MILITARY. HE NOTED THAT WHEN HE WAS PRIME MINISTER HE HAD REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE THE LEGALITY OF THE ARMED FORCES COUNCIL. HE NOW OBJECTS TO THE INCLUSION IN THE

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CONSTITUTION OF ANY PROVISION FOR SUCH A BODY. HUONG DOES NOT BELIEVE THE POWER OF THE ARMED FORCES COUNCIL COULD BE CONFINED TO MERELY GIVING ADVICE, REGARDLESS OF HOW THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION IS WRITTEN. HE FEARS THAT THE COUNCIL ILL INTERFERE IN GOVERNMENT BY INSISTING ON NAMING CORP COMMANDERS AND DICTATING STRATEGY. THE GOVERNMENT MUST BE ALLOWED TO GOVERN, FREE OF INTERFERENCE SUCH AS HE SUFFERED FROM BOTH THE ARMY AND THE MILITANT BUDDHISTS. IN TAIWAN THE MILITARY IS A FOURTH BRANCH OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND ABOVE ALL FOUR BRANCHES IS CHIANG KAI-SHEK. BUT IN VIET NAM THERE IS NO CHIANG.

10. HUONG WAS VERY CRITICAL OF THE CONSTITUTION'S PROVISION FOR ELECTED MAYORS AND PROVINCE CHIEFS. FOR EXAMPLE, IF THE HOA HAO ELECT A PROVINCE CHIEF, HE WILL ONLY LOOK AFTER HOA HAO INTERESTS AND WILL PAY NO ATTENTION TO THE NEEDS OF ALL OF THE PEOPLE OF THE PROVINCE.

11. WHEN EMBOFF SAID THAT THE US SUPPORTS NO CANDIDATE IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTION, HUONG OBSERVED THAT

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OUR POLICY OF NON-INTERFERENCE IS NOT REALISTIC. WHETHER THE US LIKES IT OR NOT, THE SUPPLYING OF MASSIVE AID TO THOSE IN POWER INEVITABLY RESULTS IN INTERFERENCE IN VIET NAM'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. EMBOFF STRESSED THAT THE US WILL

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USE WHATEVER INFLUENCE IT HAS TO ENCOURAGE ALL CONCERNED TO CONDUCT A COMPLETELY HONEST ELECTION AND ABIDE BY ITS RESULTS.

12. HUONG SAID HE THINKS NEITHER THIEU NOR KY HAS AT THIS TIME DECIDED DEFINITELY FOR OR AGAINST RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT. HUONG BELIEVES THAT THIEU WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE QUESTION OF WHO IS TO BE THE MILITARY CANDIDATE PUT BEFORE THE ARMED FORCES COUNCIL FOR RESOLUTION. WHEN EMBOFF MENTIONED THAT SOME SAIGON POLITICIANS SEE THE CA VOTE FOR PRESIDENTIAL AGE AS AN ENDORSEMENT OF KY BY THE ASSEMBLY (SAIGON 18653), HUONG SAID THAT THE VOTE WAS SUPPORT FOR KY, BUT NOT OPPOSITION TO THIEU. HE THEN CHARGED THAT THE ASSEMBLY SUFFERED "PRESSURE" ON THIS MATTER, AND SAID THE "EVERY MAN HAS HIS PRICE." LODGE
BT

NOTE: (*) AS RECEIVED WILL BE SERVICED UPON REQUEST..

NOTE: ADVANCE DELIVERY S/S-O, WHITE HOUSE, USIA, DOD, NSA, CIA
2/28/67--9:05 AM

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POL 14 VIETS

INCOMING TELEGRAM *Department of State*

XR POL 15-5 VIETS

SECRET

Action 50

Info 55

VZCZCMJA971JIA314
PP RUEHC
DE RUMJIR 19123 0591250
ZNY SSSSS
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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY
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FEBRUARY 28, 1967
8:37 A.M.

Saigon 19123

S E C R E T SECTION TWO OF TWO SAIGON 19123

L I M D I S

13. TOWARD THE END OF THE CONVERSATION, HUONG ASKED EMBOFF HIS OPINION OF THE PROPOSAL THAT THE ELECTION BE CARRIED OUT BY AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT. EMBOFF NOTED DIFFICULTIES OF DECIDING HOW TO SET UP SUCH A GOVERNMENT, EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT SUCH A MOVE WOULD BE EITHER PRACTICAL OR USEFUL IN ENSURING HONEST ELECTION. HUONG AGREED, AND SAID THAT IF SUCH A GOVERNMENT WERE "APPOINTED BY THE US, PEOPLE WOULD SAY THE US WAS CONTROLLING THE ELECTIONS."

14. IN COMMENTING ON INTERIM GOVERNMENT, EMBOFF NOTED THAT THIS PROPOSAL CAME FIRST FROM THE AN QUANG MILITANT BUDDHISTS. HUONG NODDED, THEN OBSERVED THAT THE MILITANT BUDDHISTS, WHETHER

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INTENTIONALLY OR NOT, HAVE CONSISTENTLY PLAYED THE COMMUNIST GAME.

15. HUONG DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS A SIMPLE MAN WHOSE FATHER WAS A "COOLIE". HE SAID HE HIMSELF WORKED AS A COOLIE IN 1945, AND SO HE KNOWS FIRST-HAND THE LIFE AND NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE. HE SAID THAT HE HAS NO PERSONAL AMBITIONS, BUT WILL SERVE IF DUTY CALLS. SPEAKING OF HIS HEALTH, HUONG SAID THAT HE NEVER ALLOWS ILLNESS TO INTERFERE WITH WORK. HE ALSO EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR THE MEDICAL ATTENTION GIVEN HIM BY AN AMERICAN MILITARY DOCTOR LIVING IN VUNG TAU, AND HE COMMENTED THAT AS A RESULT OF THIS MEDICAL HELP HE IS NOW IN BETTER HEALTH THAN WHEN HE WAS PRIME MINISTER.

16. HUONG IS LIVING IN A LARGE AND WELL-APPOINTED

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VILLA WHICH HE SAID ONCE BELONGED TO NGO DINH THUC. THERE IS AN ARMED MILITARY GUARD AT THE DOOR, AND HUONG SAID THAT HIS ONLY SERVANT IS ANOTHER GUARD. HE APPEARS TO BE IN REASONABLY GOOD HEALTH, THOUGH

EMBOFF NOTED THAT HE HAD SOME DIFFICULTY IN COMING DOWN THE STAIRS.

17. COMMENT: (A) HUONG GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF AN INTELLIGENT AND STRONG-MINDED MAN. HE HAS A KEEN RECOLLECTION OF HIS FORMER DIFFICULTIES WITH THE MILITARY AND THE BUDDHISTS, AND IT IS PLAIN THAT HE HARBORS MUCH DISTRUST FOR BOTH. HE IS EVIDENTLY NOT A GREAT DEMOCRAT AND IF HE WON THE ELECTION, HE WOULD LIKELY TRY TO BE A VERY STRONG, IF NOT PATERNALISTIC KIND OF PRESIDENT. HE EXPRESSED ADMIRATION FOR DIEM'S GOOD QUALITIES- WHILE CONDEMNING HIS ISOLATION FROM THE PEOPLE- AND THE TWO MEN MAY HAVE SOME QUALITIES IN COMMON, IN PARTICULAR HONESTY, COURAGE, A SENSE OF MISSION, A CAPACITY FOR STUBBORNNESS, AND A BASICALLY CONFUCIAN VIEW OF GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY. (B) HUONG EVIDENTLY WANTS TO RUN AND WILL PROBABLY DO SO. THERE APPEARS TO BE LITTLE CHANCE THAT HE WOULD BE WILLING TO RUN WITH KY. (C) WHILE STRESSING THE NEED FOR MILITARY-CIVILIAN COOPERATION, HUONG IS PRETTY CLEARLY THINKING

OF A CIVILIAN DOMINATED GOVERNMENT. COMPROMISE AND GIVE-AND-TAKE WITH THE MILITARY WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE EASY FOR HIM. LODGE
BT

NOTE: PASSED S/S-O, USIA, DOD, CIA, NSA, WHITE HOUSE 2/28/67, 9:40 A.M.

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